

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 003788

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/PMBS, EAP/PD, R/ECA, INR/EAP, INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [SOCI](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE PHILIPPINES: STILL A FORCE, BUT LESS SO

REF: A. MANILA 3231

[B](#). MANILA 2840

[C](#). 05 MANILA 5552

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Joseph L. Novak
for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Student activism in the Philippines has long been a political force and it remains one. This is particularly the case at state-funded universities, where many students are involved in politics, including the effort to oust President Arroyo. Private university students play less of a political role, with only a small minority involved in politics. The left remains active in state-funded universities, though the number of students joining the Communist Party appears to be in decline. Muslim students have their own groups, but few Muslims appear to be involved in extremist, anti-U.S. politics. Although student politics remains alive and well, it appears to be less of a force at this time, with more students focused on getting ahead professionally in a global world. End Summary.

Activism a Force at State Schools

[2](#). (SBU) Student activism in the Philippines has long been a political force and it remains one. (Note: This message focuses on university-level students. There is some activism among high school students, but to a much lesser extent. End Note.) This is particularly the case at state-funded universities, such as the University of the Philippines' main campus located at Diliman in Quezon City, metro Manila. "UP," as it is called, is the largest and most prestigious school in the country, with approximately 24,000 students. While it is difficult to estimate their exact number, many UP students are involved in politics. There are, for example, on campus political groups linked to the independent election monitoring group National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), the "Be not Afraid" movement (led by Opposition Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson), and a group of students loyal to former president Joseph Estrada. Leftist groups, such as Bayan Muna, Migrante, Gabriela and the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP), are also active. The League of Filipino Students, which is linked with the left, has traditionally been influential in the UP student government and currently controls the student council (see below for more regarding leftist groups on campus).

[3](#). (U) In addition to UP-Diliman, campuses of UP located in other parts of the country, such as Baguio, Los Banos, and Mindanao, have reputations for political activism. Students from UP (Baguio), for example, have participated in marches in support of striking sugar cane workers at the Hacienda Luisita plantation in Tarlac Province located north of Manila (ref c). Another state-funded university that is known to have many students active in politics is the Manila campus of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines.

[4](#). (SBU) Students from state-funded universities have been well represented in the effort to oust President Arroyo. Approximately 10,000 students (most of them from public universities) attended a July 13 rally in Makati in metro Manila to demand the resignation of President Arroyo (ref a). As with student participation in other rallies, many of these students were from the left, although a fair number were supporters of mainstream Opposition groups. Students from UP also played a key role in disseminating audio clips from the controversial wiretapped recordings of President Arroyo's conversations with a serving Commission on Elections (COMELEC) official in the aftermath of the May 2004 elections (ref b). League of Filipino Student members, for example, created a mobile phone ring tone from a short clip of the tapes, which they uploaded to the Internet. The ring tone proved wildly popular and thousands of Filipinos downloaded it onto their cell phones within days, much to the embarrassment of the government.

Private School Students Steer a Different Course

[5](#). (C) Private university students play less of a political

role, with only a small minority involved in politics. Several student leaders at private universities have told us that they and their classmates are largely apathetic toward politics, preferring to focus on their studies. Private universities in the Philippines, such as Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, the University of Santo Tomas, and the University of Asia and the Pacific, are expensive and students want to get their money's worth out of their educations. Bernie Villegas, the Vice President of the University of Asia and the Pacific, told Acting Pol/C recently that students at his university were mainly focused on getting their degrees so that they could compete for jobs.

16. (SBU) Another reason that students at private schools tend to be less drawn to politics is that most of these schools are run by Catholic orders. In general, these orders ask students to focus on their studies and they frown on active engagement by students in politics. There are exceptions to this general rule. For example, the La Salle brothers, who run De La Salle University, publicly asked for President Arroyo's resignation in June. It is believed that the brothers have close links with former president Corazon Aquino, who came out against Arroyo in July. On the other hand, the Jesuit priests who run Ateneo have not backed either side during the ongoing political infighting, defying the order's international reputation for political activism. The Opus Dei members who run the University of Asia and the Pacific are also not known to get involved in day-to-day political issues, although they do sometimes publicly discuss Church positions on such issues as family planning.

Leftist Students Active

17. (C) The left remains quite active at state-funded universities. As noted above, leftist groups, such as Bayan Muna, Migrante, Gabriela and the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP), are active at most UP campuses. These groups are legal, some have representation in Congress, and they have been very involved in the anti-Arroyo effort. These groups are also linked with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA). The number of students gravitating toward direct membership in the CPP/NPA appears to be in decline, however. Students at Manila university campuses have told Emboffs that the CPP/NPA continues to recruit on campus, but that few students join up. This stands in contrast to the situation in the 1970s through the 1980s, when many students -- spurred on by the struggle against the Marcos dictatorship -- left school and joined NPA forces fighting in the jungle. Mission has heard that some students still join the NPA. Pol FSN has told us that when she was a student at UP (Los Banos) from 1995-99 a handful of students left school to join the NPA. However, the numbers were low.

Muslim Students

18. (C) Muslim students have their own groups at universities. Many Muslims at universities in Mindanao, such as Mindanao State University in Marawi, are members of the Ranao Council and the Bangsamoro Youth movement, for example. Such groups tend to focus on local issues, including peace and development in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), as opposed to national political issues. Many Muslim students are also actively involved in local NGOs working on conflict resolution and development issues, such as GAWAD Kalinga (an NGO that builds housing in poor areas) and Bantai Ceasefire (an NGO that works to reduce tensions in conflict areas in Mindanao). Students who work for these NGOs have told poloff that they see such work as a way that they can "contribute to the Bangsamoro (Filipino Muslim) cause." Not coincidentally, many students parlay their volunteer experience while in school into paying jobs with NGOs after graduation.

19. (C) The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a Muslim insurgent group, is active on campuses in Mindanao, although it does not seem to have a dedicated student group. Some students work for the Bangsamoro Development Agency, a MILF-linked NGO focused on economic development in Mindanao. Terrorist organizations like Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf Group appear to have no toehold at the university-level.

Comment

10. (C) Although student politics remains alive and well, it appears to be less intense at this time, with more students focused on getting ahead professionally in a global world. In the late 1960s, '70s, and '80s, students in state-funded

schools were very engaged in politics, especially in left-wing politics and the effort to remove Marcos from power. Students in that timeframe were an important force and the GRP had to reckon with them in terms of rallies and street demonstrations. Today, while some students are engaged politically and participate in rallies, students overall are no longer as vital a political force as they once were. The left maintains some strength in this area, but it has suffered as the attraction of Communist ideology has faded. Trends among Muslim students need continued monitoring, but so far anti-U.S. extremism does not seem to have gained much of a beachhead.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

You can also access this site through the State Department's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/>

JOHNSON